

Message Text

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ACTION SS-15

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 EB-08 NSCE-00 SP-02
L-03 INR-10 HA-05 INRE-00 SSO-00 /066 W
-----040584 241558Z /43

O 241542Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0897
INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD IMMEDIATE
DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 08794

E.O.11652:GDS
TAGS: EAIR, UR
SUBJECT: DOWNED KOREAN AIRLINER: PILOT AND NAVIGATOR

REF: (A) STATE 103890; (B) STATE 103718; (C) MOSCOW 8555

SUMMARY: EMBASSY RAISED QUESTION OF DETENTION OF DETAINED KOREAN AIRLINER CREW MEMBERS WITH MFA USA DIVISION OFFICIAL APRIL 23 AND WITH KAPITSA APRIL 24. KAPITSA RAISED NO QUESTION ABOUT USG INTEREST IN CASE AND TOLD DCM WE WOULD BE INFORMED AS SOON AS INVESTIGATION OF INCIDENT, NOW STARTING IN LENINGRAD, IS CONCLUDED. WHILE HE WAS NOT SPECIFIC ON DURATION OF INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE, HE SEEMED TO IMPLY THAT IT WOULD BE QUICK, ADDING THAT SOVIETS DO NOT WISH TO "DRAMATIZE" INCIDENT. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF REF B, E/C COUNSELOR RAISED SUBJECT WITH MFA OFFICIAL SINITSYN ON MARGIN OF AIRPORT DEPARTURE OF SECRETARY VANCE, APRIL 23. SINITSYN HAD HANDLED ARRANGEMENTS FOR PAN AMERICAN RELIEF FLIGHT. COUNSELOR SAID WE WERE SURPRISED AND CONCERNED BY DETENTION OF CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR, CONTRARY TO WHAT WE HAD BEEN LED
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TO BELIEVE ABOUT RELEASE OF ALL PASSENGERS AND CREW. SINITSYN CLAIMED IGNORANCE BOTH OF FACT OF DETENTION OF THE PAIR AND OF ANY ASSURANCES GIVEN TO US THAT EVERYONE WOULD BE RELEASED. HE IMMEDIATELY ASKED POINTED QUESTION ABOUT WHO REPRESENTED KOREAN INTERESTS IN USSR. COUNSELOR SAID THAT EXPLICIT STATEMENT HAD BEEN GIVEN HIM BY MFA OFFICIAL TRIFINOV OVER TELEPHONE WHEN HE HAD CALLED TO ASK FOR

EXPLANATION OF TERM "PASSENGERS" IN SOVIET NON-PAPER HANDED DCM BY KAPITSA (REF C). TRIFINOV HAD SAID THAT TERM COMPRISED "ALL WHO HAD BEEN ON BOARD THE AIRCRAFT." SINITSYN TOOK NOTE OF OUR EXPRESSION OF CONTINUING CONCERN IN CASE.

2. ON APRIL 24, DCM, ACCOMPANIED BY E/C COUNSELOR, CALLED ON KAPITSA IN MFA AT 10:30 LOCAL TIME TO DISCUSS CASE. AFTER EXPRESSING THANKS FOR SOVIET ASSISTANCE IN REPATRIATION OF PASSENGERS, DCM ASKED THAT REMAINING CREW MEMBERS BE RELEASED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND REASON WHY THEY WERE NOT RELEASED, PARTICULARLY AFTER WE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT ALL PERSONS ON THE AIRCRAFT WOULD BE RELEASED. KAPITSA SAID THAT HE HAD NOT GIVEN SUCH AN ASSURANCE, POINTING TO WORD "PASSENGERS" IN NON-PAPER GIVEN US APRIL 21. DCM SAID THAT COUNSELOR HAD CALLED MFA OFFICIAL TRIFINOV, WHO HAD BEEN PRESENT AT APRIL 21 MEETING, FOR EXPLANATION OF THIS POINT AND THAT TRIFINOV HAD GIVEN ALL-INCLUSIVE DEFINITION TO THIS TERM. KAPITSA MADE NO EFFORT TO DENY POINT. (FYI: WE REGRET THAT REF C MAY HAVE LED DEPARTMENT TO CONCLUDE THAT ASSURANCE WAS GIVEN BY KAPITSA RATHER THAN TRIFINOV. END FYI.)

3. KAPITSA EXPLAINED THAT KOREAN PLANE HAD PENETRATED SOVIET AIRSPACE FOR OVER 800 KILOMETERS. HE SAID THAT THE CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR ARE IN KEM BUT WILL BE TAKEN TO CONFIDENTIAL

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LENINGRAD TODAY FOR INVESTIGATION BY SOVIET COURT. SOVIETS WOULD INFORM US AS SOON AS RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION ARE KNOWN AND DO NOT WISH TO "DRAMATIZE" INCIDENT. DCM INQUIRED HOW LONG THIS PROCEDURE WOULD TAKE. KAPITSA SAID HE HAD INQUIRED ABOUT THAT EARLIER IN THE MORNING. THE PROCEDURE WAS JUST GETTING STARTED TODAY. HE DID NOT KNOW HOW LONG IT MIGHT LAST, KAPITSA SAID, ADDING THAT WE WOULD BE INFORMED AS SOON AS THERE WAS A RESULT.

4. DCM POINTED OUT THAT ALTHOUGH AIRCRAFT HAD UNDOUBTEDLY PENETRATED SOVIET AIR SPACE, IT HAD CLEARLY BEEN A MISTAKE. OBVIOUSLY THE PILOT HAD NOT FLOWN A PASSENGER AIRCRAFT OVER THE USSR WITH MALICE AFORETHOUGHT. KAPITSA RESPONDED THAT PILOT HAD NOT OBEYED COMMAND TO LAND AND HAD CONTINUED TO FLY FOR TWO HOURS. DCM RESPONDED THAT ACCORDING TO THE COMMENTS OF THE CO-PILOT IN HELSINKI, THE KOREAN PLANE HAD TRIED TO CONTACT THE SOVIET INTERCEPTOR BY RADIO BUT HAD FAILED. AFTER BEING HIT, ONE WING WAS DAMAGED, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO FLY. IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT AN EMERGENCY LANDING WAS NECESSARY, THE PILOT HAD BEEN OBLIGED TO BURN OFF THE ADDITIONAL FUEL SUPPLY, AND THAT IS WHY HE CIRCLED FOR AN EXTENDED TIME BEFORE LANDING.

5. KAPITSA SAID HE WOULD PASS ALONG EXPRESSION OF U.S. INTEREST IN RAPID RELEASE OF REMAINING CREW MEMBERS, NOTING THAT THERE HAD BEEN AN ANALOGOUS APPROACH TO SOVIETS IN WASHINGTON. DCM SAID WE WERE PREPARED TO ASSIST IN REPATRIATION OF REMAINING CREW MEMBERS ONCE RELEASED.

6. AT CONCLUSION DCM MENTIONED THAT HE EXPECTED BAGGAGE

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AND AIR FREIGHT LEFT AT MURMANSK WOULD BE RETURNED TO OWNERS VIA COMMERCIAL AVIATION CHANNELS. (WE HAVE INFORMED PAN AMERICAN OF THIS AND UNDERSTAND THAT THEY PLAN TO CONTACT KAL IN PARIS.)

7. COMMENT: WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO MAKE JUDGMENTS BASED ON APPEARANCES, KAPITSA'S REFERENCE TO POSSIBILITY OF EARLY SOLUTION AND OF SOVIET INTENTION NOT TO "DRAMATIZE" INCIDENT LEAD US TO HOPE THAT REMAINING CREW MEMBERS WILL BE RELEASED WITHOUT UNDUE DELAY. TOON

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